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# CONFRONTING UNCERTAINTY WITH DECENTRALIZED COMMAND

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## British Naval Decision Making at the Outbreak of the War of 1812

*Kevin D. McCranie*

On June 18, 1812, the United States declared war on Britain. Although the declaration hardly could be described as unexpected, given years of strained relations, the United States did obtain a degree of surprise.<sup>1</sup> This was inevitable given the distance between the two countries and the nature of period communications—it took weeks to transmit information between the United States and Britain. The slowness of communications created a window of vulnerability for British naval forces in North American waters.

Events in Britain only exacerbated the exposure of its naval forces. On June 8, ten days before the American declaration of war, a new government formed in London. One of its first acts constituted an attempt to ameliorate a major point of conflict with the United States: it suspended the restrictions on American commerce delineated in previous orders in council. Through late June and most of July, British leaders in London hoped their conciliatory gesture would lead to a favorable response. Little did they know that the Americans had declared war five days prior to Britain's repeal of the orders.<sup>2</sup>

Only in late July did news of the American war reach London. British decision makers then had to consider whether the Americans, given the suspension of

the orders in council, would back away from hostilities. The uncertainty contributed to additional delays, and it was not until September 26 that new instructions and leadership reached Halifax, Nova Scotia.<sup>3</sup>

Between the June 18 declaration of war and the arrival of new instructions and leadership on

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September 26, British naval leaders in North American waters faced tremendous uncertainty. Vice Admiral Herbert Sawyer, commander of the North American station and the senior officer at Halifax, served as the theater commander for an area of operations that spanned southward from the Gulf of Saint Lawrence in the north, past Halifax and the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, to the northern edge of the Bahamas; Sawyer's command stretched eastward to include Bermuda as well.<sup>4</sup>

Sawyer had to go to war with the force he had, not necessarily the warships he needed. He had to execute operations relying on old instructions and his understanding of British strategic priorities and intent. In an uncertain environment, he had to lead British naval operations in theater while providing his political leaders with assessments of American intentions. Captain Philip Broke, commanding the thirty-eight-gun frigate *Shannon*, was the second key British naval decision maker in North American waters.<sup>5</sup> He oversaw Sawyer's principal strike force. Broke's primary mission involved mitigating the threat the U.S. Navy posed. This article assesses how Sawyer and Broke made decisions, executed operations, managed risk, and dealt with uncertainty at the outbreak of the War of 1812.<sup>6</sup>

Royal Navy (RN) operations during the opening months of the War of 1812 underscore the complexity of naval decision making at the campaign level. This is a subject that all too often is lost between descriptions of naval battles and general narratives of naval war. Yet a study in naval decision making aids in understanding the relationship among governmental leaders, their theater commanders, and operational elements at sea.

## THE WORLD SITUATION

Much of what Sawyer and Broke encountered at the outbreak of the War of 1812 was expected. Naval leaders in the age of sail operated in an environment in which communications were slow, so officers had to be agile enough to deal with evolving circumstances, from minor incidents to acts of war. Naval officers had to be aware of government intent so their actions could fulfill broader objectives.

Yet the specific circumstances that Sawyer and Broke encountered were unique. Britain already was engaged in a protracted, multitheater war against Napoleonic France, with the Royal Navy operating in the role of the dominant naval power. The War of 1812 originated on the periphery of the larger conflict, meaning the isolation Sawyer and Broke faced was more extreme than their peers faced in European waters. This was not a new theater in an existing war against a familiar naval foe, but a new opponent in a geographically distant region fought in parallel with the ongoing Napoleonic struggle. For Britain, the existential threat was France, not the United States.

## THE SITUATION IN AMERICA

Even so, leaders in London recognized that something needed to be done. “As soon as the discussions in America began to take a serious turn,” the secretary of the British Admiralty explained, “the British government sent orders to their naval officers, not couched in doubtful terms, but in the plain good old English style.”<sup>7</sup> Leaders in London understood that if the United States initiated hostilities, their theater commander in American waters required guidance.

Sawyer received the following three directives, dated May 1812:

1. To repel any hostile aggression, but also take care not to commit one.
2. In the event of a declaration of war by America, or the issue of letters of marque, or any invasion of the provinces and islands [of Canada], to commence and direct hostilities, and to sink, burn, or destroy American ships, and to pursue all other measures, offensive and defensive, for the annoyance of the enemy and the protection of his Majesty’s subjects.
3. To exercise, except in the specified cases, all possible forbearance towards citizens of the United States.<sup>8</sup>

These three instructions sought to meet wider policy aims. Governmental leaders in London attempted to minimize tensions by directing the Royal Navy to employ “all possible forbearance towards citizens of the United States.”<sup>9</sup> They wanted to avoid a war that necessarily would drain assets from the primary war against France. If hostilities did occur, destroying American ships would deprive America of commerce while driving commerce into British protection. Moreover, the elimination of American warships and privateers that could threaten British merchant shipping forwarded “the protection of his Majesty’s subjects.”<sup>10</sup> Avoiding war was the best-case scenario, but if war did occur the initial naval object sought to limit America’s ability to use and disrupt the maritime commons.

Sawyer’s order “to sink, burn, or destroy American ships” highlighted the way to protect a critical vulnerability—Britain’s sea lines of communication (SLOCs). The commerce that passed along these maritime arteries ensured Britain’s global economic position.<sup>11</sup> In 1812, every major RN deployment had for its fundamental object the protection of British commercial interests, with naval stations arranged at terminal, choke, and transit points along the SLOCs.<sup>12</sup> Major trade routes included the link between the British Isles and their possessions in the West Indies. These trade routes were largely dependent on prevailing currents and winds. The latter circled the Atlantic in a clockwise pattern. Shipping outward bound from Britain plunged south until it reached the latitude of Barbados, where it caught trade winds that propelled it westward across the Atlantic. The return voyage to Britain followed the predictable current of the Gulf Stream. This brought such shipping close to the Eastern Seaboard of the United

States. Sawyer's North American command mitigated threats to commerce on this part of the return voyage. At approximately the latitude of Boston, shipping pressed eastward into the Atlantic, using the Azores as a waypoint on its voyage to the British Isles.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Sawyer's command was positioned to protect the terminal point of the sea-lanes between the British Isles and its possessions in Canada. The U.S. declaration of war put these sea-lanes at immediate risk. The instructions to Sawyer attempted to mitigate this vulnerability by directing him to destroy American warships, privateers, and merchant commerce. The object of ensuring the security of the SLOCs dominated the design and execution of British naval operations during the opening months of the War of 1812.

### OPENING ENGAGEMENTS—AND CONFUSION

On June 23, 1812, about a hundred miles east of New York, lookouts aboard the thirty-six-gun British frigate *Belvidera* sighted a small squadron. Captain Richard Byron identified the strangers as American warships. Given his orders and the tension between the United States and Britain, he beat a hasty retreat, but the squadron gave chase. During the afternoon, the lead ship, the American frigate *President* under Commodore John Rodgers, opened fire. Only then did Byron allow his crew to engage. Three hours into the chase, Byron had his crew start the water over the side and cast nonessential items into the sea. Now lighter, *Belvidera* drew away from its pursuers. It had been a close-run affair.<sup>14</sup> These were the opening shots of the War of 1812 at sea.

Four days later, Byron brought *Belvidera* into the harbor at Halifax, where he found Admiral Sawyer.<sup>15</sup> Sawyer must have been unsure how to proceed. His most recent instructions directed him "[t]o repel any hostile aggression, but also take care not to commit one."<sup>16</sup> With regard to the latter, he had only to remember several previous shooting incidents between British and American warships. In 1807, HMS *Leopard* had fired on the American frigate *Chesapeake* owing to a suspicion of British deserters aboard the American warship. Outrage in the United States nearly resulted in war. Four years later, in 1811, Rodgers, commanding *President*, almost destroyed the British warship *Little Belt*. This shooting incident occurred in the dark; both the British and the Americans thought the other at fault.<sup>17</sup> Indicative of the early confusion over *Belvidera*'s encounter, one British periodical posited, "Our Government has expressed an opinion, that the attack made upon the *Belvidera* had neither resulted from any new orders of the American Government, nor was any proof that war had been decided on."<sup>18</sup>

Was *Belvidera*'s engagement merely another incident, or was it war? Sawyer needed confirmation. If it had been a mere incident, an overzealous and aggressive reaction could precipitate actual war; whereas if hostilities already existed, hesitation could result in the loss of British warships, commerce, or worse.

Sawyer's instructions were clear: if he could confirm that a state of war existed, he was "to commence and direct hostilities."<sup>19</sup>

Given the high level of uncertainty about American intentions, Sawyer's first move involved the collection, assessment, and dissemination of intelligence. Less than a day after the battle-scarred *Belvidera* made Halifax, Sawyer dispatched the naval sloop *Colibri* to New York under a flag of truce to determine whether a state of war existed. He also sent vessels to London and Jamaica with details of the attack. Just in case it had not been an accident, he dispatched another warship to warn the commanding officer at Newfoundland and ask for reinforcements.<sup>20</sup>

All these reports were incomplete. Sawyer could only speculate about why the Americans had attacked *Belvidera*. Doing the best he could, Sawyer pieced together the disparate accounts he could glean from American newspapers and the dated reports of British diplomats.<sup>21</sup> It took over a week after *Belvidera* reached Halifax to confirm the declaration of war. When Sawyer did receive indisputable proof of hostilities on July 5, it cost him another warship to carry this news to England.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE SITUATION IN HALIFAX

Sawyer's response also had to take into account the means at his disposal. He had but twenty-three operational warships.<sup>23</sup> On paper, this might appear impressive, but his area of operations required extensive deployments. Moreover, he had to provide escorts to convoys. Few warships were then at Halifax, or at least nothing approaching the combat power of the American squadron that nearly had overwhelmed *Belvidera*. That the Admiralty in London had provided Sawyer with less than an optimal force might lead to accusations of mismanagement, considering that Britain was the dominant naval power, possessing approximately half the world's warship tonnage.<sup>24</sup> However, the navy as a whole was stretched thin, given global naval commitments and ongoing operations against Napoleonic France.<sup>25</sup>

On June 30, three days after the battle-damaged *Belvidera* had anchored at Halifax, the thirty-eight-gun frigate *Shannon* and the thirty-two-gun frigate *Aeolus* arrived. Captain Broke of *Shannon* related, "We came in five days from Bermuda—thinking all tranquil & pacific with America—and *counting* only on a *dull tiresome refit* at this port, before we could resume our *cruise*, . . . but on arriving here . . . we met *rumours of war*" (emphasis original).<sup>26</sup> Chance favored the British. Not only had *Belvidera* escaped, but a planned refit had brought two additional frigates to Halifax. Sawyer saw an opportunity. *Belvidera* completed hasty repairs and Sawyer's flagship, the sixty-four-gun *Africa*, stood ready. With *Shannon* and *Aeolus*, the British had three frigates and a sixty-four-gun ship concentrated for operations. Sawyer thought this force sufficient to deal with the American squadron. *Shannon*, *Africa*, *Belvidera*, and *Aeolus* sailed from Halifax

on July 5 under the overall command of Captain Broke, just hours after receiving indisputable proof that the United States in fact had declared war.<sup>27</sup>

Rather than assigning Broke command of his most powerful naval detachment, Sawyer surely wished to raise his flag in *Africa* and personally proceed in quest of the American squadron, but he remained at Halifax. The uncertain political and naval situation meant that Sawyer needed to stay in communication. At Halifax, Sawyer could coordinate better among the various elements of his command. He had no idea when reinforcements would arrive, he had yet to receive instructions from London detailing specific objectives or rules of engagement, and he was unclear regarding what kind of war the Americans intended to wage. In addition, the location of the American squadron that had attacked *Belvidera* was unknown. Tracking down leads would require significant adaptation, and this could draw the British squadron far from Halifax.

Moreover, Sawyer expected developments in the Gulf of Maine and its offshoot, the Bay of Fundy. This constricted area of water contained several important British Canadian ports, including Saint John, New Brunswick. To complicate matters, the bordering New England states were the center of American maritime activity. Sawyer expected cities such as Boston, Salem, Gloucester, and Marblehead, Massachusetts, to fit out numerous privateers.<sup>28</sup> Such commerce raiders possessed government-issued licenses to prey on British shipping but were owned, fitted out, and manned by private individuals, resulting in a state-sanctioned business venture that sought profit from the capture of commerce belonging to hostile states.

The threat of American privateers materialized more slowly than expected, however. It took eight days after the declaration of war for the U.S. government to legalize their use.<sup>29</sup> An additional factor delayed the sailing of privateers: in April 1812, Congress had placed a ninety-day embargo on all American shipping. This prevented the sailing of American merchant ships, with the object of keeping the Royal Navy from sweeping them from the seas in the first weeks of a war. The embargo did not expire until July 4, 1812—and the government made no exception for privateers.<sup>30</sup> As one U.S. newspaper aptly printed, “Is it not very odd that privateers would be prevented from sailing sixteen days after war is declared?”<sup>31</sup>

A narrow window of opportunity existed during which the Americans might have benefited from the Royal Navy’s ignorance of hostilities. That window had closed by the time American privateers entered the fray because HMS *Indian*, an eighteen-gun sloop, and *Plumper*, a ten-gun brig, already had reached the Bay of Fundy.<sup>32</sup> Although this did not prevent American privateers from taking several quick prizes and even blockading the British Canadian port of Saint Andrews, British actions mitigated the damage. Sawyer assessed the threat as severe. When *Spartan*, a thirty-eight-gun frigate, returned to Halifax on July



9, Sawyer dispatched it to the Bay of Fundy. The thirty-six-gun *Maidstone*, the first wartime reinforcement to reach Sawyer's command, joined *Spartan*. British warships alternated among escorting convoys, including a hastily organized one of a hundred vessels; patrolling to sweep up privateers; and conducting small raids up rivers to neutralize privateers in their nests.<sup>33</sup> The British had significant success, taking more than twenty privateers between mid-July and mid-August, with nearly all the captures occurring in the waters between the Bay of Fundy and Halifax.<sup>34</sup>

Sawyer's decision to remain at Halifax instead of sailing in quest of Rodgers's squadron also allowed for the more effective employment of eleven reinforcing warships. Quietly dispatched between mid-May and July, they trickled into North American waters during the early months of the war. The Admiralty had intended these warships to take the place of those cycling home with convoys and to provide limited reinforcements to buttress Sawyer's command in the midst of worsening tensions with the United States. But they served a different purpose, giving Sawyer additional options and helping to soften the initial blows to British commerce.<sup>35</sup>

## TWO SQUADRONS

With Admiral Sawyer remaining at Halifax to manage naval deployments across the theater of operations, Captain Broke had a more specific objective: dealing with Commodore Rodgers and his squadron of American warships. The British decision to seek out the American squadron rested on the assessment that Rodgers posed the most dangerous threat to British maritime interests. He had the strength to eliminate British warships, put SLOCs at risk, and savage a valuable convoy. Whereas American privateers aimed at inflicting cumulative losses on British maritime commerce over a protracted period, Rodgers's squadron in a single blow could inflict significant damage, not just to commercial shipping, but even to British warships.

Sawyer had two choices when developing instructions for Broke. He could provide restrictive orders, in an effort to maintain tighter control, or he could provide his intent, trusting his subordinate to execute operations effectively. During the period of uncertainty at the outbreak of the conflict, it was unclear whether the Americans expected direct aid from France. Sawyer worried that such aid would manifest as a combined expedition aimed at Halifax. In hindsight, an attack on Halifax was beyond the means of the United States; however, the possibility caused Sawyer concern during July 1812, and he had no way to recall Broke in the event such an attack transpired.<sup>36</sup> Given this factor alone, there certainly was much to be said for keeping tight control over Broke's detachment.



However, the nature of communications, coupled with the scarcity of warships, led Sawyer to choose a decentralized command model. The speed of communications limited any attempt at control because it would stifle Broke's initiative. This was particularly true given the uncertainty about the Rodgers squadron. Restrictive orders would make an encounter with the American squadron less likely. Sawyer explained to Broke that his actions "must depend on information you may from time to time obtain either of the situation or movements of the American Squadron or other circumstances, and it is left to your judgement and discretion to act as shall appear to you best for His Majesty's Service." Sawyer prioritized forward deployments, but this caused Sawyer to explain to Broke, "I have no means of keeping up a communication with you, till the arrival of reinforcements from England."<sup>37</sup> Without reserves, Sawyer became isolated from the operational elements of his command. Sawyer decided to trust Broke to make informed decisions.

Four days out, Broke's squadron linked up with the thirty-eight-gun British frigate *Guerriere*.<sup>38</sup> Broke now controlled four frigates and a ship of the line. This was a powerful squadron, especially when viewed as a percentage of Sawyer's overall command. At the outbreak of hostilities, Sawyer controlled five true frigates; Broke now had four of them in his squadron, leaving only *Spartan* for other assignments. Also attached to Broke's squadron was the sixty-four-gun *Africa*. Launched in 1781 and hardly considered a frontline warship by 1812, Admiralty documents still described *Africa* as a third-rate ship of the line—the sole warship larger than a frigate in Sawyer's entire command.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, Sawyer had depleted the combat power of his entire command to provide Broke with an effective force. It now fell on Broke to determine the location of Rodgers's squadron. The last positive intelligence was over two weeks old, dating from *Belvidera*'s running fight. Broke had to make an educated guess regarding what Rodgers had done in the meantime. He concluded that the Americans most likely had returned to either Boston or New York, the principal ports with the maritime infrastructure to sustain a powerful American naval squadron. Therefore Broke took his squadron toward Nantucket, to place his ships between those two cities. He hoped to lure Rodgers out for a fight by attacking trade in the area.<sup>40</sup> Broke maintained that he would "continue to destroy all such as are not worth our sending in . . . and hope thus to make the Enemy feel the Evils of the War they have so wantonly began."<sup>41</sup>

Then, on July 12, Broke fell in with *Colibri*, the flag-of-truce vessel Sawyer had sent to New York. Several British diplomats had taken passage aboard *Colibri* there, and they provided Broke with intelligence on the strength of Rodgers's squadron. It contained the forty-four-gun *President*, the forty-four-gun *United States*, the thirty-six-gun *Congress*, the eighteen-gun *Hornet*, and the sixteen-gun *Argus*.<sup>42</sup>

Sawyer had dispatched Broke's command with an object of defeating the American squadron. How well would the sixty-four-gun *Africa*, the thirty-eight-gun *Shannon*, the thirty-eight-gun *Guerriere*, the thirty-six-gun *Belvidera*, and the thirty-two-gun *Aeolus* have done in an engagement with Rodgers's command? First, it should be noted that the rated number of guns provides only an approximation of combat power; most of the warships mentioned above mounted more than their rated number of guns. The rating system itself was a legacy system that did not take into account developments such as the introduction of the short-range carronade. Moreover, the Americans had a tendency to rate warships smaller than they actually were—this served a propaganda purpose.<sup>43</sup> In this case, it meant that the thirty-six-gun *Congress* displaced roughly two hundred tons more, and had a slightly heavier broadside, than either the thirty-eight-gun *Shannon* or the thirty-eight-gun *Guerriere*.<sup>44</sup>

How the British warships compared with forty-four-gun American warships such as *President* and *United States* is a particularly thorny question. William James, a contemporary observer and the first British historian of the war, argued that warships such as *President* were built of heavier timbers than seventy-four-gun British ships of the line.<sup>45</sup> In a later study, Theodore Roosevelt countered, "The American 44-gun frigate was a true frigate."<sup>46</sup> In reality, *President* and *United States* displaced about 40 percent more than thirty-eight-gun frigates such as *Shannon* and *Guerriere* and 50 percent more than thirty-six-gun frigates such as *Belvidera*. In terms of armament, the principal battery of the American warships consisted of twenty-four-pound guns, while British frigates such as *Shannon*, *Guerriere*, and *Belvidera* mounted eighteen-pound guns. In comparison with a sixty-four-gun ship such as *Africa*, *President* and *United States* displaced approximately 150 tons more, had a similar complement, and threw a broadside that was one hundred pounds heavier, albeit with a larger percentage of short-range carronades.<sup>47</sup>

Considering the above information, the two squadrons were fairly equal in aggregate combat power, but several factors gave the British a slight advantage. Although each squadron contained five warships, the small sizes of the Americans' *Hornet* and *Argus* would make them very fragile instruments of war in any engagement. Moreover, two-thirds of Rodgers's total broadside weight consisted of carronades, including almost the entire armament of *Hornet* and *Argus*; carronades comprised only 40 percent of the British broadside weight.<sup>48</sup> In a long-range engagement, the Americans would have to rely on two oversized frigates and one just a bit more powerful than *Shannon* to fight a sixty-four-gun ship and four smaller frigates.

Although the odds were in Broke's favor, he worried that Rodgers had linked up with other U.S. frigates. Information gleaned from American newspapers

indicated that the thirty-two-gun *Essex* likely had joined the American squadron. And Broke believed that *Constitution*, the third forty-four-gun American frigate, also might have joined Rodgers.<sup>49</sup> The addition of either of these warships would tilt the odds in Rodgers's favor.

In the worst case, Broke's command had the combat power to inflict enough damage to make the American squadron a nonfactor in the coming months. By the time the Americans had repaired any battle damage, British naval reinforcements would have shifted the naval balance in American waters permanently.

## OFF NEW YORK

The diplomats aboard *Colibri* also informed Broke that Rodgers had not returned to port after his action with *Belvidera*. "It was generally believed they were gone in search of the homeward bound West Indies Fleet under convoy of the *Thalia*."<sup>50</sup> Although this was accurate information, Broke needed confirmation, so he proceeded toward the entrance to Long Island Sound.<sup>51</sup> On July 14, he left his squadron over the horizon and brought *Shannon* inshore to gather intelligence about the American squadron. Specifically, Broke sought local fishermen or those involved in the coasting trade; such individuals stayed connected with events ashore and had access to local newspapers.<sup>52</sup>

Since it was unlikely that an American would speak with a British naval captain knowingly, Broke perpetrated a ruse. He hoisted American colors over *Shannon* and pretended to be the U.S. frigate *Congress*. It would take an extremely educated eye to tell *Congress* and *Shannon* apart: their dimensions were nearly identical and each mounted eighteen-pounders on its main gun deck.<sup>53</sup> (Flying false colors was a perfectly legitimate deception that all navies of this period used; the deception became dishonorable only if one fired on an opponent while still under a false flag.)<sup>54</sup>

In two separate incidents, Broke lured fishermen aboard *Shannon*. He even told them that he had parted company with Commodore Rodgers after running low on water. Broke described the fishermen as "thoroughly deceived," for they provided him with significant information, including accurate details about the engagement with *Belvidera*.<sup>55</sup> Since Broke knew the correctness of this news, he viewed the remaining information as more reliable, including reports that Rodgers had pursued a homeward-bound British West India convoy.<sup>56</sup> The information gleaned from the fishermen, in combination with the reports received from the diplomats aboard *Colibri*, indicated that Rodgers had pursued a West India convoy. But Broke remained skeptical; although the diplomats and fishermen had provided similar information, Broke worried that the newspapers on which the intelligence was based were inaccurate. Broke announced, "I shall anxiously seek for some further accounts of the American Squadron."<sup>57</sup>

Broke was not the only one attempting to locate Rodgers; U.S. Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton also wanted to find him. At the outbreak of hostilities, Hamilton had given Rodgers permission to surprise British warships in the offing before “returning immediately after into port.”<sup>58</sup> However, after attacking *Belvidera* Rodgers did not follow Hamilton’s instructions. It took several weeks for Hamilton to realize that Rodgers was seeking bigger objectives than isolated British warships. The arrival of British warships on the U.S. coast caused Hamilton’s apprehension to grow, so he dispatched the fourteen-gun *Nautilus* to locate Rodgers’s squadron. *Nautilus* proceeded to sea on July 15 with a difficult task. There were two squadrons at sea—one under Rodgers, the other under Broke. They were similar in size, and from a distance would look very much alike. *Nautilus*’s challenge was to find the right squadron; at this it failed. *Nautilus* fell in with Broke’s command on July 16, and after a short chase became Broke’s prize.<sup>59</sup>

No sooner had Broke gobbled up *Nautilus* than his frigates chanced on *Constitution*. The outbreak of hostilities had found the latter in Annapolis, Maryland, and in need of additional men. Hamilton ordered *Constitution* to join Rodgers at New York. The ship was off New Jersey when Broke’s squadron found it. After an epic chase, *Constitution* finally outran the British squadron on the morning of July 19.<sup>60</sup>

During the pursuit of *Constitution*, Broke’s squadron became badly strung out, with the frigates drawing well ahead of *Africa* and *Nautilus*; *Africa*, an old sixty-four-gun ship, could hardly keep up with the more nimble frigates, and *Nautilus* was manned with only a prize crew. *Africa*’s captain, not waiting for instructions, sent *Nautilus* to Halifax with the information that Broke had obtained. Sawyer had not provided Broke the means to stay in contact, but the fortuitous capture of *Nautilus* alleviated this issue. Later, Broke described the captain of *Africa* as acting with “great judgement”: with only a prize crew, *Nautilus* added little to the British squadron but could provide Sawyer with valuable intelligence, and *Africa*’s captain seized the opportunity.<sup>61</sup>

The news *Nautilus* carried informed Sawyer of Broke’s movements over the previous two weeks. Broke consistently had positioned his squadron where Rodgers was most likely to come to him. Initially, Broke had expected Rodgers’s squadron to be anchored at either Boston or New York. He tried to draw Rodgers out for a fight by putting American commerce at risk. Simultaneously, he sought intelligence. What he obtained indicated that Rodgers was still at sea, likely in search of a convoy. If true, such intelligence changed Broke’s mission. While continuing to seek confirmation, Broke placed his command between Rodgers’s squadron at sea and his most likely base of operations at New York. In this location, Broke’s squadron was positioned to snap up *Nautilus* and *Constitution*. The

latter escaped only by superior sailing. Broke accurately concluded that both *Nautilus* and *Constitution* also were on the lookout for Rodgers's squadron.<sup>62</sup>

## OF CONVOYS

After chasing *Constitution*, Broke pondered his next move. He needed to shift his squadron from its position off New York. The longer it remained, the more likely it became that Rodgers would divine Broke's position and avoid him by seeking another port. Rather than gamble on the port to which Rodgers would return or search for the American squadron directly, and "[h]aving received undoubted information [that] Commodore Rogers [*sic*] was gone upon the Grand Bank of Newfoundland to lie [in] wait for our West India Convoys and considering the vast injury his squadron might do in that point," Broke later would explain that "it appeared to me the more important duty to abandon the plan we had entered upon for distressing the Enemy trade, for the protection of our own."<sup>63</sup>

Broke understood the centrality of Britain's maritime trade. No matter how much he wanted to engage the American squadron or gain prize money by capturing American merchant commerce, the ulterior objective of protecting British commerce remained paramount. So Broke sailed eastward across the Atlantic in quest of the West India convoy. Oddly enough, finding the convoy increased the likelihood of encountering Rodgers: since convoys sailed along predictable routes, this one would act as a magnet for the American commodore. By seeking out the convoy, Broke again was attempting to force Rodgers to come to him.

On the morning of July 29, the squadron exchanged signals with the convoy's sole escort, the thirty-eight-gun frigate *Thetis*, about six hundred miles east of New York City.<sup>64</sup> Broke explained, "This fleet was talked of confidentially in America as the chief object of Commodore Rogers' [*sic*] hazardous enterprise;—we shall at least ensure their safety, and I hope our escorting them may lead to a meeting of the Squadron."<sup>65</sup>

But Broke's assessment was flawed: although he had found a West India convoy, he had not found the one Rodgers had pursued. The convoy Broke located comprised approximately seventy ships and had sailed in early July; Rodgers instead had pursued the May convoy, comprising 120 merchant vessels escorted by the thirty-six-gun frigate *Thalia* and the eighteen-gun sloop *Reindeer*.<sup>66</sup> After the running fight with *Belvidera*, Rodgers had approached the May convoy. Rodgers nipped at its heels between June 29 and mid-July; he received reports from several merchant vessels that the convoy was nearby; his squadron even sailed through garbage the convoy had left floating in its wake. But the pursuit was to no avail, and on July 13, when Rodgers was nearly into the approaches to the English Channel, he called it off. All this occurred before Broke even had captured

*Nautilus*. After Rodgers gave up his quest for the convoy, he made a large circuit of the Atlantic before heading home.<sup>67</sup>

The convoy Broke found was never in danger—but this assessment is available only from the perspective of hindsight. Both the Admiralty in London and Sawyer at Halifax approved of Broke's actions.<sup>68</sup> Given the convoy's value, the weakness of its escort, and the uncertainty of the American threat, the risk had been too high to act otherwise. The convoyed merchant vessels had arrived safely; the prime difficulty in assessing successful commerce defense involves understanding why it worked. Rather than seeking the enemy and defeating it through a sequential series of actions, commerce protection involved the complex interplay of convoys, escorts, and patrols—and a high degree of chance. Only by knowing Rodgers's position in relation to that of the convoy can one conclude that Broke did nothing either to deter the American squadron or to protect the convoy most at risk. Although Broke failed to bring Rodgers to battle, he had assessed the available intelligence, understood the centrality of commerce in Britain's grand strategy, and concentrated his squadron at a decisive point—in this case, in relation to a convoy. Instead of directly seeking battle with Rodgers, Broke prioritized Britain's trading empire, understanding that this course of action was the most likely way to bring Rodgers to him.

So Broke's squadron stayed with the convoy as it lumbered toward England. *Africa* and *Thetis* provided direct protection, while the frigates chased down sightings. One of these turned out to be an American merchant vessel that had encountered Rodgers's squadron on July 10. Broke learned that Rodgers had not pursued *Thetis*'s convoy but instead was ahead of it. Prevailing currents and winds would make it difficult for Rodgers to double back and attack the convoy that Broke now protected. Thus, it was reasonably safe. Even so, Broke split his squadron, leaving *Africa* and *Guerriere* to assist *Thetis* in shepherding the flock of merchantmen.<sup>69</sup>

At longitude 45 degrees W, these two warships followed Broke's orders and parted with the convoy. Over the next week, they slowly clawed their way back toward Halifax. On the afternoon of August 14, *Guerriere* and *Africa* intentionally went separate ways: *Africa* steered for Halifax, carrying Broke's official reports, while *Guerriere* continued on patrol. Only five days after parting with *Africa*, *Guerriere* encountered *Constitution*. The ensuing battle resulted in the first significant British naval loss of the war.<sup>70</sup>

### GROPING IN THE DARK—TO LITTLE EFFECT

Meanwhile, Broke took *Shannon*, *Belvidera*, and *Aeolus* toward the American coast, where he hoped to intercept Rodgers. Broke was now attempting to confront the American squadron with only three frigates, since he had gleaned from



various sources of intelligence that Rodgers also had three frigates, not four or even five as Broke once had believed.<sup>71</sup> Another factor in Broke's decision to confront Rodgers with a reduced force stemmed from his assessment of the U.S. Navy. When Broke learned of *Constitution's* victory over *Guerriere*, he concluded, "We are all eager for an opportunity of *convincing the Yankees* how much they are indebted to chance for their success in this contest. Their force is superior in ship & metal & number of men—but not in *skill or courage equal*" (emphasis original).<sup>72</sup> Broke did not respect his opponent, and it can be assumed that he thought the crews of his three smaller frigates equal to the task of defeating Rodgers's more powerful frigates.

However, by reducing his squadron to three frigates Broke had accepted additional risk; there was no margin for any circumstance that would further reduce his command. This is exactly what occurred on the night of August 10, when *Belvidera* became separated from *Shannon* and *Aeolus* during a chase. *Belvidera's* Captain Byron then captured *Hare*, an American merchant brig with a treasure trove of intelligence. Some weeks earlier, *Hare* had encountered Rodgers's squadron. Thinking the merchantman would beat the American squadron home, a number of letters were sent across. These now fell into British hands. Understanding their significance, Byron immediately pressed for Halifax.<sup>73</sup>

When *Belvidera* arrived on August 24, Byron not only brought Sawyer the captured letters; he provided the first reports of Broke's movements over the previous month. Problematically, Byron did not have Broke's actual reports—these were aboard *Africa*, which still was making its way slowly toward Halifax. Without a clear description of Broke's intentions, Sawyer faced considerable uncertainty, but he needed to act quickly. The captured letters indicated that the Americans would return to the United States at the end of August. Sawyer directed the thirty-eight-gun *Spartan* and thirty-six-gun *Maidstone* to reinforce Broke.<sup>74</sup> These reinforcements became even more important when *Aeolus* had to go in for water—Broke was now alone as Rodgers approached.<sup>75</sup>

At Halifax, Sawyer obtained additional intelligence about Rodgers from *Statira*, a thirty-eight-gun frigate that Sawyer had taken under his command after the start of hostilities. The ship encountered Rodgers's squadron on August 26 while patrolling along Saint Georges Bank. The distance between the American warships and *Statira* was enough to leave both sides in doubt about the exact nature of the encounter, but two days later *Statira* again fell in with the squadron, and this time the Americans spied the British frigate and gave chase. The pursuit lasted sixteen grueling hours before the weather came on thick, swallowing up the British ship.<sup>76</sup> Rodgers again had failed to capture an isolated British warship; and, just as *Belvidera* had done two months earlier, *Statira* carried news of the encounter to Halifax. Sawyer quickly assembled another squadron comprising



*Statira*; the forty-gun *Acasta* and the thirty-eight-gun *Nymphé*, two other war-time frigate reinforcements; and the former U.S. sloop *Nautilus*, now recommissioned as *Emulous*. This squadron sailed on September 2 with orders to find Broke and defeat the American squadron.<sup>77</sup>

This was all for naught, however. The same day that *Statira* made Halifax, the American squadron anchored at Boston. Sawyer characterized the American venture as “a very unsuccessful cruize—having taken and destroyed seven vessels of little value.”<sup>78</sup> Rodgers certainly achieved less than he had desired. He failed to capture a single British warship or locate even a small British convoy. Yet the British could consider themselves extremely fortunate. The American squadron had chased *Statira* and had come within the narrowest margin of capturing *Belvidera*. And only a few miles had separated Rodgers from an extremely valuable but weakly escorted West India convoy of approximately 120 merchant vessels.

### A RETURN TO THE LARGER PICTURE

Sawyer had devoted the best of his command to seeking out Rodgers’s squadron, at the expense of other responsibilities. Even as late as September 9, Sawyer wrote of “the inferior force I had to meet the various exigencies” on the station.<sup>79</sup> Broke added, “I am bitterly disappointed at not meeting the squadron we are looking for—& who have diverted our attention from every other pursuit.”<sup>80</sup> Privateers had damaged British commerce, and many American merchant vessels had escaped the tentacles of the Royal Navy while Broke sought Rodgers.

Worse still, British deployments had broken down. British actions hinged on Broke maintaining concentration at the critical point, but the nature of period communications and the lack of smaller vessels to carry reports between Broke and Sawyer curtailed effective interaction. Without efficient communications, the instructions Sawyer provided Broke in early July became critical. High levels of uncertainty caused Sawyer to allow Broke significant discretion in developing a course of action. By all evidence, Broke ably assessed available information and acted in accordance with the intent of his instructions and Britain’s strategic priorities. The result, however, drew Broke deep into the Atlantic to protect a vulnerable convoy. There was no way to keep Sawyer informed. After seeing the convoy to safety, Broke allowed his command to fragment. This was in part a response to intelligence about the strength of Rodgers’s squadron, but other factors contributed to the five-ship squadron becoming five widely separated individual warships.

In the aftermath, *Guerriere* was lost in combat. *Africa* slowly lumbered back to Halifax with Broke’s reports. The delay in getting these to Sawyer further contributed to the uncertainty gripping British operations in late August and early September. *Belvidera* separated from Broke in a chase, then captured vital

intelligence about Rodgers's movements. Captain Byron took the information to Halifax, since this was a fixed point, whereas seeking Broke was akin to finding a needle in a haystack. After apprising Sawyer at Halifax, *Belvidera* failed to rejoin Broke before Rodgers reached Boston.<sup>81</sup> *Aeolus* parted with *Shannon* on August 28 because of a lack of water. As luck would have it, *Aeolus* encountered *Spartan* and *Maidstone* the next day. They provided *Aeolus* with enough water to remain on station, but they failed to locate *Shannon*.<sup>82</sup> Broke found himself alone on the American coast—and Rodgers slipped by everyone.

Then, adding insult to injury, Broke encountered the U.S. frigate *Essex* late in the afternoon of September 4. Although *Shannon* overhauled the American frigate, darkness fell before Broke could bring the American to action. It was a close-run affair, with the captain of *Essex* describing his escape as “extraordinary.” The result likely would have been quite different if Broke had had another frigate or two in company, allowing him to use multiple warships to cut off *Essex*.<sup>83</sup> The lack of water, chance, and other priorities had left Broke alone, however.

### BRITISH NAVAL LEADERSHIP

Captain Broke's performance exemplifies naval leadership at the operational level of war. His assessment of intelligence, acceptance of risk, and decision making despite limited information provide instructive examples. Six weeks into the operation, Broke's squadron fragmented. This was, at least in part, the result of the choices he made; but how long can an isolated squadron commander maintain the mental acuity to make the best choices before uncertainty leads to negative results?

While Broke dealt with the single problem of Rodgers's squadron, Sawyer had to master theater command. He had twenty-three warships at the outbreak of hostilities, and this number grew with the arrival of the thirty-six-gun *Maidstone*, thirty-eight-gun *Nymphe*, forty-gun *Acasta*, and thirty-eight-gun *Statira*. In addition, seven smaller warships arrived with convoys.<sup>84</sup> These reinforcements were offset during the first three months of the war by the combat losses of the thirty-eight-gun *Guerriere* and the schooner *Laura*, while the British lost the eighteen-gun *Emulous* to the wiles of the ocean.<sup>85</sup> Normal operations also diminished the command. Sawyer dispatched several warships with convoys, while others carried news of hostilities to distant locations. By September, Sawyer's command was only slightly larger than it had been at the outbreak of hostilities; however, it did contain a larger percentage of frigates.

Sawyer juggled forces and prioritized commitments, acting most decisively when he received news of Rodgers's squadron, first by dispatching Broke, then by sending *Spartan* and *Maidstone*, and finally by dispatching *Statira*, *Nymphe*, and *Acasta*. Convoys sailed at regular intervals—Sawyer did not interrupt their

sailings because of the war; in fact, he provided escorts for the unexpected convoy that departed British Canadian ports in the Bay of Fundy in July. Sawyer also provided warships to maintain a presence around Halifax and Bermuda, the two bases that were essential to sustaining his command.

Finally, Sawyer sought out American privateers. This proved easier than it should have been, owing to U.S. government delay in passing enabling legislation for commissioning private armed vessels, as well as the decision not to amend the 1812 Embargo Act to allow privateers to sail before it expired. For privateers, surprise came not from where but when they would strike. Commerce warfare could inflict more significant damage if conducted before widespread knowledge of the commencement of hostilities. Once Sawyer had learned of the declaration of war, he understood that the Gulf of Maine and the Bay of Fundy would be prime operating grounds. It would take longer for the Americans to commission a meaningful number of large, oceangoing privateers; until then, hastily commissioned, smaller private armed vessels could seek easy prizes in nearby waters. Overall, however, the British were less vulnerable than they should have been, owing to American delays and Sawyer's foresight.

Sawyer managed naval deployments during the opening months of the war effectively, but the Admiralty decided he was unfit for independent command. He had been appointed to his position in October 1810, when North America was a backwater: tensions had calmed after the *Leopard-Chesapeake* incident, and the shooting incident between *President* and *Little Belt* was months in the future. But once the Admiralty became aware of hostilities in late July 1812, it sought a more experienced commander.

Although Sawyer managed naval operations effectively, he lacked an appreciation of broader political considerations. In early July, Sawyer had dispatched *Julia* to England with "certain intelligence of the act of the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States Declaring War against Great Britain having been approved by the President." When *Julia's* commander, Valentine Gardner, brought Sawyer's dispatches to the lords commissioners of the Admiralty, they censored Sawyer, noting "their regret that on a subject of such extreme importance as that of a declaration of war by America you should not have given their Lordships the particulars of the information which you state yourself to have received, and that you did not send the American official documents upon this subject which Captain Gardner of the *Julia* reports to have seen at Halifax."<sup>86</sup>

Sawyer's haste in dispatching this information to London likely led to the omissions. Certainly, he had operated in a vague sense of suspended animation for the week between *Belvidera's* arrival at Halifax following the ship's escape from Rodgers's squadron and the official confirmation of the war. These were tense and uncertain days, and it is understandable that Sawyer failed to

provide the Admiralty all the details. Although the omission might have been understandable, the Admiralty did not view it as excusable. For one thing, the First Lord of the Admiralty had to address other government leaders about the declaration of war without critical documentation, which was embarrassing. Moreover, Sawyer did not direct Captain Gardner to detain the mail and passengers aboard *Julia* until the Admiralty had been informed about the declaration of war. This failure led the Admiralty to complain that the resultant “spillage” (to use a modern term) provided that “the Public was in possession of as early and *more ample* information than His Majesty’s Government” (emphasis original).<sup>87</sup> This was not just embarrassing; it caused Britain’s political leaders to work at a disadvantage as they tried to address the outbreak of hostilities. So, while Sawyer may have managed naval operations on a distant station adequately, he lacked the political acumen to interface with the British government. There was more to command on a distant station than merely being proficient at the operational level of war. The Admiralty understood that Sawyer was operationally competent, but not politically savvy.

Rather than remove Sawyer, the Admiralty decided to amalgamate the North America, Leeward Islands, and Jamaica stations under a senior admiral who could provide the oversight necessary to link the political, strategic, and operational aspects of Britain’s naval response to the War of 1812. Sawyer would remain the senior officer at Halifax, where he could focus on operational issues, while the new commander would manage operations from Halifax to Barbados.<sup>88</sup> The presumed ability of one officer to command such an extensive area of operations led to the following quip: “Why they have excluded the East Indies and the Mediterranean, I know not, for surely they might as rationally have been included in this most unprecedented command.”<sup>89</sup> Certainly, it was unparalleled—and in fact proved unwieldy.

The Admiralty’s choice to fill the new position was Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren. He had commanded in North America in the aftermath of the *Leopard-Chesapeake* affair and had extensive experience both operationally and as a diplomat.<sup>90</sup> Although Warren’s command included the North America, Leeward Islands, and Jamaica stations, it is telling that he sailed directly for Halifax. This was the decisive point for controlling British naval operations in its war against America, and Warren needed to establish communications with Sawyer to obtain firsthand information about the progress of the naval war.

When Captain Broke learned of the change, he wrote, “Sir John Warren’s arrival makes a grand revolution in our government, poor Adml Sawyer is much hurt at the rude manner in which the Admt’y have deprived him of his chief command.—perhaps he will go home.”<sup>91</sup> This was prophetic. Warren reached Halifax on September 26, and just days later Warren wrote privately to a member

of the Admiralty that Sawyer was “unwell & I believe it is so & he is very Grumpy also at what he calls being superseded in his command.” Rather than having a disgruntled subordinate, Warren gave Sawyer permission to return to England.<sup>92</sup>

With Warren’s arrival, the first chapter of Britain’s naval War of 1812 came to a close. Operationally, British naval leaders had demonstrated considerable skill at managing fog and friction while accounting for uncertainty. The British lacked a complete picture of American political intentions and an exact understanding of how the Americans planned to wage war at sea. This required leaders such as Admiral Sawyer and Captain Broke to work with available information and make assumptions about the rest.

At the same time, they had to prioritize. Prioritization does not come easily to a dominant naval power; after all, its navy should be able to master all threats. But in this case the available warships were insufficient, and it took time for reinforcements to arrive. Sawyer and Broke sacrificed everything else to protect British commercial shipping. Warships protected convoys and the SLOCs rather than directly engaging American warships and privateers or sweeping up American commerce. Sawyer and Broke understood the difference between seeking battle and ensuring maritime security. In uncertain conditions and with a less-than-adequate force, security took priority. British naval officers in North American waters showed a keen regard for Britain’s commercial position and understood the role of warships in supporting Britain’s global maritime trading empire.

Yet Sawyer’s reward was to be superseded as theater commander. The Admiralty did not plan to remove Sawyer—he was an effective operator. Instead, Sawyer asked to be removed, since he felt aggrieved when the Admiralty placed Warren in a position to be his immediate superior. To demonstrate that the Admiralty held little ill will, the same First Lord of the Admiralty by 1814 had appointed Sawyer to command the Irish station. This was a command in close communication with London that oversaw convoys and patrols on the approaches to the English Channel—a command that demanded Sawyer’s expertise.<sup>93</sup>

However, the outbreak of war with the United States required a different type of know-how; it demanded an admiral who simultaneously could manage deployments and communicate broader strategic and even policy-level considerations. Sawyer did not communicate well enough with his political superiors. Distance and the speed of communications certainly made exchanges with London more difficult, but these factors were known, and Sawyer could have accounted for them by lavishing more care on his reports, to include all available documentation. That he did not do so proved embarrassing, which led to friction between the civilian leaders and their senior officer at Halifax.

Understanding intent, identifying objects, and managing risk are not the only hallmarks of success in decentralized command; clarity and precision in communications prove just as important, for without these attributes, the tenuous links among decentralized nodes of authority become strained. The Americans contributed enough to the uncertain environment; ambiguity need not have been exacerbated by the failure of naval leaders to provide adequate communications with their civilian masters.

## NOTES

1. Statements by Earl Bathurst (February 18, 1813) and Viscount Castlereagh (February 18, 1813), 24 Parl. Deb. (1st ser.) (1813), p. 609; Rory Muir, *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon, 1807–1815* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 234–35.
2. William Hamilton to Foster, May 11, 1812, and Castlereagh to Foster, June 17 and 23, 1812 (and Attached Memorandum), in *Instructions to the British Ministers of the United States, 1791–1812*, ed. Bernard Mayo (New York: Da Capo, 1971), pp. 379, 381–83; *London Gazette*, June 23–27, 1812; Jon Latimer, *1812: War with America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 33–34. It should be noted that the suspension of the orders in council would become permanent only if the U.S. government responded by ending its restrictions on British shipping.
3. Croker to Sawyer, July 29, 1812, pp. 28–29, Admiralty Papers [hereafter ADM] 2/1375, The National Archives, Kew, U.K. [hereafter TNA]; Warren to Croker, October 5, 1812, p. 98, ADM 1/502, TNA; Robert Stewart, “Statement of British Naval Forces on the North American Stations, 1810–1813,” in *Correspondence, Despatches, and Other Papers of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry*, ed. Charles W. Vane, Marquess of Londonderry (London: William Shoberl, 1851) [hereafter *Castlereagh*], vol. 8, p. 289.
4. Instructions to Sawyer, October 7, 1810, pp. 175–99, ADM 1/159, TNA.
5. Regarding ships and the number of their guns, throughout this article: For British warships, the number of guns is drawn from “Ships in Sea Service,” July 1, 1812, ADM 8/100, TNA. For American warships, the number comes from Paul Hamilton [Secretary of the Navy] to William Giles [Chairman, Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Senate], December 14, 1811, in *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States; Naval Affairs*, ed. Walter Lowrie and Walter S. Franklin (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1834), vol. 1, pp. 265–66.
6. The bicentennial of the War of 1812 has stimulated significant scholarship on the naval war. A survey of the most important new studies includes Stephen Budiansky, *Perilous Fight: America’s Intrepid War with Britain on the High Seas, 1812–1815* (New York: Knopf, 2010); George C. Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Brian Arthur, *How Britain Won the War of 1812: The Royal Navy’s Blockades of the United States, 1812–1815* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell, 2011); and Andrew Lambert, *The Challenge: Britain against America in the Naval War of 1812* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012). However, none of these works have addressed British naval decision making at the outbreak of the war specifically. Studies that do address the opening of the naval war are more dated. Jeff Seiken provides the American perspective in “‘To Strike a Blow in the World That Shall Resound through the Universe’: American Naval Operations and Options at the Start of the War of 1812,” in *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Fourteenth Naval History Symposium*, ed. Randy C. Balano and Craig L. Symonds (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), pp. 131–46. Barry J. Lohnes penned an article in 1973 addressing the British navy at Halifax. While superb at identifying the constraints



- the British faced, Lohnes fails to explain what reasonably could be expected from the British naval force at the outbreak of hostilities. See "British Naval Problems at Halifax during the War of 1812," *Mariner's Mirror* 59, no. 3 (1973), pp. 317–33. There is no biography of Sawyer. Broke received an edited volume in 2013, but it focused on his critical victory over the U.S. frigate *Chesapeake* rather than his decision making in the early months of the war. See Tim Voelcker, ed., *Broke of the Shannon and the War of 1812* (Barnsley, U.K.: Seaforth, 2013).
7. Statement by Croker, February 18, 1813, 24 Parl. Deb. (1st ser.) (1813), p. 645.
  8. *Castlereagh*, vol. 8, pp. 287–88. Note: these points are direct quotes from the British document.
  9. *Ibid.*
  10. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
  11. Julian S. Corbett, "Napoleon and the British Navy after Trafalgar," *Quarterly Review*, no. 471 (April 1922), pp. 238–39; Arthur, *How Britain Won the War of 1812*, p. 57; Lambert, *The Challenge*, p. 17; James Davey, *In Nelson's Wake: The Navy and the Napoleonic Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2015), pp. 313–14; Kevin D. McCranie, "The War of 1812 in the Ongoing Napoleonic Wars: The Response of Britain's Royal Navy," *Journal of Military History* 76, no. 4 (October 2012), pp. 1067–94; Kevin D. McCranie, "Britain's Royal Navy and the Defeat of Napoleon," in *Napoleon and the Operational Art of War: Essays in Honor of Donald D. Horward*, ed. Michael V. Leggiere (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 2016), pp. 476–99.
  12. "Ships in Sea Service," July 1, 1812.
  13. Patrick Crowhurst, *The Defence of British Trade, 1689–1815* (Folkestone, U.K.: Dawson, 1977), p. 171; N. A. M. Rodger, "Weather, Geography and Naval Power in the Age of Sail," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, nos. 2–3 (1999), p. 191.
  14. Byron to Sawyer, June 27, 1812, ADM 1/502, TNA; Log of *Belvidera*, June 23, 1812, ADM 51/2018, TNA.
  15. Log of *Belvidera*, June 27, 1812, ADM 51/2018, TNA; Sawyer to Croker, July 5, 1812, p. 45, ADM 1/502, TNA.
  16. *Castlereagh*, vol. 8, p. 287.
  17. Spencer C. Tucker and Frank T. Reuter, *Injured Honor: The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair, June 22, 1807* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996); Jonathon Woodard Hooks, "A Friendly Salute: The President–Little Belt Affair and the Coming of the War of 1812" (PhD dissertation, Univ. of Alabama, 2009).
  18. "Naval History of the Present Year, 1812 (June–July)," *Naval Chronicle* 28, pp. 73–74.
  19. *Castlereagh*, vol. 8, p. 288.
  20. Sawyer to Croker, July 5, 1812.
  21. Foster to Sawyer, Washington, June 15, 1812, p. 44, ADM 1/502, TNA; Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War, 1805–1812* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 406; Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1989), p. 41.
  22. Sawyer to Croker, July 21, 1812, p. 68, ADM 1/502, TNA.
  23. "Ships in Sea Service," July 1, 1812. Twenty-three is the number of operational warships, which omits noncombat vessels such as receiving ships.
  24. Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500–1860*, Stockholm Studies in History 48 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993), vol. 2, p. 376.
  25. McCranie, "The War of 1812 in the Ongoing Napoleonic Wars."
  26. Broke to his wife, July 2, 1812, Broke Papers, HA 93/9/105, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich, U.K. [hereafter SRO].
  27. Sawyer to Croker, July 5, 1812.
  28. Sawyer to Croker, July 21, 1812, p. 68.
  29. An Act Concerning Letters of Marque, Prizes, and Prize Goods, June 26, 1812, in *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, ed. William S. Dudley et al. (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 167–69.
  30. Latimer, *1812: War with America*, p. 33.
  31. *The Columbian* (New York), July 2, 1812.
  32. Sawyer to Croker, July 5, 1812.
  33. Sawyer to Croker, July 21, 1812; Log of *Spartan*, August 1–3, 1812, ADM 51/2812, TNA; *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), August 15, 1812.



34. H[erbert] Sawyer, "List of American Privateers Taken . . . between the 1st July and 25th August 1812," in *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, ed. Dudley et al., vol. 1, pp. 225–26. The first capture occurred on July 16, the final one on August 21.
35. *Castlereagh*, vol. 8, p. 288.
36. Sawyer to Broke, July 4, 1812, p. 351, ADM 1/1553, TNA.
37. *Ibid.*
38. The name of this ship appears throughout without a diacritical accent. When it was in French service, an accent was used; once it entered British service, the accent was dispensed with.
39. "Ships in Sea Service," July 1, 1812; Sawyer to Croker, July 5, 1812; Rif Winfield, *British Warships in the Age of Sail, 1793–1817: Design, Construction, Careers and Fates* (London: Chatham, 2005), p. 100; Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organisation 1793–1815* (London: Conway Maritime, 1994; repr. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003), p. 48; Brian Lavery, *The Ship of the Line*, vol. 1, *The Development of the Battlefleet 1650–1850* (London: Conway Maritime, 1983), p. 126.
40. Broke to Sawyer, July 12, 1812, no. 2, HA 93/6/2/8, SRO.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Sawyer to Croker, July 21, 1812. The intelligence indicated that the squadron under Rodgers consisted of *President*, *United States*, *Congress*, *Hornet*, and *Wasp*. The only difference was that Rodgers's actual squadron included the sixteen-gun *Argus* instead of the eighteen-gun *Wasp*.
43. Kevin D. McCranie, *Utmost Gallantry: The U.S. and Royal Navies at Sea in the War of 1812* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011), p. xiii.
44. Paul H. Silverstone, *The Sailing Navy 1775–1854* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), pp. 28, 30; Winfield, *British Warships*, pp. 165, 176.
45. William James, *Naval History of Great Britain* (London: Harding, Lepard, 1826; repr. London: Macmillan, 1902), vol. 5, p. 381; William James, *Naval Occurrences of the War of 1812: A Full and Correct Account of the Naval War between Great Britain and the United States of America, 1812–1815* (repr. London: Conway Maritime, 2004), p. 8.
46. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Naval War of 1812; or, The History of the United States Navy during the Last War with Great Britain*, 3rd ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1883), p. 60.
47. "Ship Manning and Guns," ADM 7/556, TNA; Winfield, *British Warships*, pp. 100, 124; Silverstone, *The Sailing Navy, 1775–1854*, pp. 26–27.
48. "Ship Manning and Guns"; Silverstone, *The Sailing Navy, 1775–1854*, pp. 26, 28, 46–47; Winfield, *British Warships*, pp. 100, 154, 165, 168, 176.
49. Broke to Croker, July 30, 1812, p. 351, ADM 1/1553, TNA.
50. Sawyer to Croker, July 21, 1812. *Thalia* was a thirty-six-gun frigate.
51. Rodgers to Hamilton, June 21, 1812 (two letters of this date), pp. 47–48, Letters from Captains, M125, reel 24, record group 45, National Archives and Records Administration, United States [hereafter RG 45, NARA].
52. Broke to Sawyer, July 14, 1812, no. 4, HA 93/6/2/8, SRO.
53. *Ibid.*; Silverstone, *The Sailing Navy, 1775–1854*, p. 28; Winfield, *British Warships*, p. 165.
54. Faye M. Kert, *Privateering: Patriots & Profits in the War of 1812* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2015), pp. 21–22.
55. Broke to Sawyer, July 14, 1812.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*
58. Hamilton to Rodgers, June 18, 1812, p. 61, Letters to Officers, M149, reel 10, RG 45, NARA.
59. Hamilton to Crane, July 10, 11, 1812, pp. 92–93, M149, reel 10, RG 45, NARA; Crane to Hamilton, July 29, 1812, p. 114, Letters from Officers below the Rank of Commander, M148, reel 10, RG 45, NARA.
60. Hull to Hamilton, July 7, 1812, p. 94, M125, reel 24, RG 45, NARA; Hamilton to Hull, June 1, July 3, 1812, pp. 61, 86, M149, reel 10, RG 45, NARA; Broke to Croker, July 30, 1812.
61. Broke to Sawyer, July 14, 1812, entry for July 21, no. 4, HA 93/6/2/8, SRO.

62. Ibid.
63. Broke to Croker, July 30, 1812.
64. Pocket journal of *Shannon*, July 24–29, 1812, HA 93/10/24, SRO; Journal of *Shannon*, July 24–29, 1812, HA 93/6/2/112, SRO; Log of *Thetis*, July 29, 1812, ADM 51/2874, TNA. This convoy originally had a second escort, the twenty-two-gun *Garland*, but that ship parted with the convoy in the Straits of Florida.
65. Broke to Croker, July 30, 1812.
66. Vashon to Stirling, June 8, 1812, Stirling to Croker, July 13, 1812, p. 138, ADM 1/263/124, TNA; Byam to Croker, August 24, 1812, ADM 1/1553/359, TNA; Log of *Garland*, July 1–2, 11–12, 1812, ADM 53/572, TNA.
67. Rodgers to Hamilton, September 1, 1812, p. 2, M125, reel 25, RG 45, NARA.
68. Admiralty response attached to Broke to Croker, July 30, 1812, ADM 1/1553/351, TNA.
69. Broke to Sawyer, August 7, 1812, no. 11, HA 93/6/2/8, SRO; Log of *Shannon*, August 5–9, 1812, ADM 51/2861, TNA.
70. Broke to Sawyer, August 7, 1812; Log of *Africa*, August 8–14, 1812, ADM 51/2092, TNA. For information on *Constitution* and *Guerriere*, see James, *Naval History of Great Britain*, vol. 5, pp. 371–83; Robert Gardiner, *The Naval War of 1812* (London: Chatham, 1998), pp. 40–43; Lambert, *The Challenge*, pp. 75–78; Daughan, *1812: The Navy's War*, pp. 73–85; Budiansky, *Perilous Fight*, pp. 141–47; and McCranie, *Utmost Gallantry*, pp. 48–52.
71. Broke to Sawyer, August 7, 1812.
72. Broke to his wife, September 22, 1812, HA 93/9/113, SRO.
73. Sawyer to Croker, August 25, 1812, p. 83, ADM 1/502, TNA; Log of *Belvidera*, August 21, 1812, ADM 51/2018, TNA.
74. Sawyer to Croker, August 25, 1812, p. 83.
75. Broke to his wife, August 23, 1812, entry for August 28, HA 93/9/110, SRO.
76. Rodgers to Hamilton, September 1, 1812; Sawyer to Croker, September 9, 1812, ADM 1/502/92, TNA; Logs of *Hornet*, *United States*, and *Congress*, August 26–28, 1812, record group 24, NARA; Log of *Statira*, August 26, 28, 1812, ADM 51/2814, TNA.
77. Sawyer to Croker, September 9, 1812.
78. Sawyer to Croker, September 17, 1812, ADM 1/502, TNA.
79. Sawyer to Croker, September 9, 1812.
80. Broke to his wife, August 9, 1812, HA 93/9/109, SRO.
81. Log of *Belvidera*, August 15–September 5, 1812, ADM 51/2018, TNA.
82. Log of *Aeolus*, August 28–31, 1812, ADM 51/2106, TNA.
83. Porter to Hamilton, September 2, 1812, p. 18, M125, reel 25, RG 45, NARA; Log of *Shannon*, September 4, 1812, ADM 51/2861, TNA.
84. *Castlereagh*, vol. 8, p. 288.
85. Warren to Croker, October 5, 1812, p. 98; Winfield, *British Warships*, pp. 176, 295, 360. When this existing *Emulous* was lost in 1812, the Royal Navy applied the name to the former USS *Nautilus*, as noted earlier. The latter ship was sold out of the service in 1817.
86. Croker to Sawyer, July 29, 1812.
87. Ibid.
88. Croker to William Hamilton, August 3, 1812, pp. 33–34, ADM 2/1375, TNA.
89. Lord Radstock to Son, August 4, 1812, Waldegrave Family Papers, WDG/11/13/27, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, U.K. [hereafter NMM].
90. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Sir John Borlase Warren”; Peter LeFevre, “Sir John Borlase Warren, 1753–1822,” in *British Admirals of the Napoleonic Wars: The Contemporaries of Nelson*, ed. Peter LeFevre and Richard Harding (London: Chatham, 2005), pp. 229–44.
91. Broke to his wife, September 22, 1812, entry for September 27, HA 93/9/114, SRO.
92. Warren to Johnstone Hope, October 7, 1812, Correspondence with Lord Melville, MEL/101, NMM; Warren to Croker, October 18, 1812, p. 111, ADM 1/502, TNA.
93. Various letters, 1814, Cork, Irish station, ADM 1/626, TNA.